

'Ham' operators make air waves

By JOHN ENIGL

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More than a century of combined experience by two Door County amateur radio operators, George Gabert and Clayton Cardy, was honored recently by the Quarter Century Wireless Association in Port Washington.

Gabert, who received his first license in 1923, was cited for 60 years of participation in the hobby; Cardy for 50 years of operation.

There are only about 400 radio amateurs who have been on the air for 60 years in the entire country, although some have been "hams" for longer than 60 years.

"The old-timers don't like the term 'ham' radio operator, although it means 'helping all mankind.' When you think of a 'ham,' it carries the idea that you don't know very much about what you are doing, like a 'ham' actor. With amateur radio, there is quite a bit you have to know," Gabert said.

Amateur radio consists of two-way communication by means of the International (incorrectly called the Morse) code, by voice, by teletype, and by television using electronic equipment through the air waves. Because of the danger of interference with vital commercial and government communications, operators are licensed by the federal government, the only hobby so regulated.

Proficiency in the code and knowledge of electronic theory and practice are required to pass the licensing test. Radio amateurs often have their own portable or mobile transmitters and receivers, with power supplies. Often they have provided the only communications from the scene of disasters.

Gabert became interested in amateur radio shortly after the federal government lifted the World War I ban on the hobby, receiving his first call letters, 9JIM, in 1923, while he was still a student at Sturgeon Bay High School. At that time, there were only about 8,000 radio amateurs in the country.

His call letters were changed to W9JIM about 1929.

Much of Gabert's early communication equipment was home built. By the 1930s, several manufacturers began to build some radio amateur receivers, but



Clayton Cardy



George Gabert

George built all of his transmitters himself up until World War II. He used some of the first radio tubes ever built to construct his equipment.

Gabert recalls a terrible ice storm in 1933 that cut off all telephone communication from Door County, and put the electric power lines out of commission.

From 7:30 a.m. until midnight he provided the only contact with Green Bay through another amateur radio operator there. He directed repair operations from his home in Sturgeon Bay, and assisted the telephone company in getting vital messages through.

"I never received a 'thank-you' from the telephone company," Gabert recalls. "They even gave me a bad time when, a few months later, I wanted to put my telephone on stand-by while I went on vacation. But the electric company did thank me."

A radio contact Gabert will never forget is one in March 1938. He didn't know the identity of the man he talked to, only his call letters and first name. It turned out, when he received the man's QSL (station report card), that he was talking to the Archduke of Austria, who a few weeks later fled Austria when Hitler took

over.

Radio amateurs were ordered off the air in 1941 with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. When George resumed his hobby in 1945, he began working toward an award given by the American Radio Relay League. He installed home-built mobile radio equipment in his car and contacted every state with it by 1951.

When the award came, there was a notation that George was the first person ever to receive the award for contacting all the other states with mobile radio gear.

Cardy, whose call letters are W90V0, got interested in amateur radio at Sturgeon Bay High School also. By 1941, he had made hundreds of radio contacts with persons in other states and other countries. But the war started and he says, "I knew it would be quite a while, at least a few years, before we could go back on the air."

But the experience and knowledge about electricity helped Cardy to participate in the war effort.

"When the war started in 1941," Cardy recalls, "I received a call to go down to Madison to teach electronics. But instead, I got a job as an electrician in the shipyard in Sturgeon Bay, so I made my knowledge of electricity of use in that way."

After World War II, Cardy became one of the founders of the Badger Emergency Net, a group of radio amateurs that met every night on the air to transmit messages from one part of the state to another, sometimes on an emergency or priority basis.

Both men continue to talk to other states and countries, but much of their communication is done via

the two meter FM repeater on the tower of the local radio station, WDOR. Speaking from hand-held "handie-talkies," their words are received by the repeater, which rebroadcasts their messages at much greater power.

"There's no way," Cardy says, "that even an enemy attack could stop all radio communications in Door County. In case of disaster, we are hooked in with the emergency government system. The members of our

club (The Door County Amateur Radio Club) all have portable and mobile equipment and their own antennas. There's no way that even an invading army could locate all this communication gear and put it out of service."

These two radio amateurs who came all the way from the crystal detector to the transistor, the integrated circuit and the computer, continue to look for new ways for amateur radio to serve mankind.